

THE INDYPENDENT

#286: MARCH/APRIL 2024



TYRONE WALLACE

LABOR ON THE MOVE

A NEW WAVE OF UNION ORGANIZING KEEPS SPREADING, AND WINNING

BY AMBA GUERGUERIAN — P6



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CLAIRE ROE

MARCH/APRIL

SAT MAR 30 • 1:15–4:30PM • FREE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY: *GET TO KNOW THE UNION* TENANT FORUM & POLITICAL EDUCATION
Brooklyn Eviction Defense will host a tenant assembly for tenants from across Brooklyn. There will be report backs from organizers and discussions of housing issues and how to wield collective power through tenant unions. There will also be a workshop from the Migrant Solidarity Committee.
CENTRAL BROOKLYN LIBRARY: INFO COMMONS ROOM
10 Grand Army Plaza
BKLYN

SAT MAR 30 • 5PM • FREE
MARCH: LAND DAY 2024
For Palestinians, this year’s Land Day is especially urgent as Israel’s violent land grabs continue. Since 1976, the day has recognized the sacrifice of those who have bravely stood up against the Israeli occupation with strikes, protests, and demonstrations.
TIMES SQUARE
42 & Broadway
MNHTN

WED APR 3 • 9PM–1AM • SUGGESTED DONATION
RAMADAN NIGHT MARKET
Explore halal foods & delights from popular NYC restaurants and Muslim-owned street vendor carts under the moonlit sky on Steinway St. in Astoria. This event is a fundraiser to keep women and girls safe by providing self-defense workshops and bringing more cultural programming to Queens. Every dollar contributed goes directly to this work. Tickets found via eventbrite: www.bit.ly/astorianightmarket.

MALIKAH & MUSLIM FOODIES
28th Ave Steinway - 25th Ave Steinway
QNS

WED APR 3 • 7–10 PM • \$15 GENERAL ADMISSION/\$7 REDUCED PRICE
FILM: *GAZA GHETTO: PORTRAIT OF A PALESTINIAN FAMILY*
Through the intimate scenes of family life in the Jabalia refugee camp as well as intercuts with Israeli regime soldiers on patrol in the camp, *Gaza Ghetto* is more relevant than ever in connecting Palestine’s past and current despoilment. Proceeds will go to the Palestine Children’s Relief Fund.
1984, 82min, 16mm
MAYSLES DOCUMENTARY CENTER
343 Malcolm X Blvd.
MNHTN

WED APR 10 • 6:30–8PM • FREE
CONVERSATION: *MEDICAL RACISM, AN ISSUE OF LIFE AND DEATH*
Dr. Uché Blackstock, author of *A Black Physician Reckons with Racism in Medicine*, will discuss our society’s deeply racialized health-related inequalities and the prospects for change with Dr. Aletha Maybank, founder of the American Medical Association’s Center for Health Equity. Their conversation will be moderated by journalist Jenna Flanagan.
CENTER FOR BROOKLYN HISTORY
128 Pierrepont Street
BKLYN

FRI APR 12 • 6PM • FREE
BOOK TALK: *DISMANTLING GREEN COLONIALISM*
Will the transition to renewable energy in the Global North lead to a new round of extraction in poor nations? A discus-

EPIC: On April 26, the Black Comic Book Festival will celebrate the work of creators like Vita Ayala, author of the “Nebula” series.

sion between Hamza Hamouchene, co-editor of *Dismantling Green Colonialism*, and Ashley Dawson, author of *Environmentalism from Below*, will explore the ways in which the imperative to transition off fossil fuels is leading to neo-colonial forms of energy and resource extraction in the Global South.
THE PEOPLE’S FORUM
320 West 37th St.
MNHTN

SAT APR 13 • 4–7PM • FREE
CONCERT AND PANEL: *FROM TIN PAN ALLEY TO THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE*
Celebrate Duke Ellington’s 125th birthday and the music of the Harlem Hellfighters, the infantry regiment that fought in World War 1 and then introduced Europe to Jazz. A panel discussion will be held before the concert featuring George Calderaro, Marilyn Lester, John Reddick and Bobby Sanabria. The concert will feature the Bobby Sanabria Multiverse Big Band
BRONX MUSIC HALL
438 E. 163rd St.
BX

THU APR 18 • 7PM • \$18
FILM Q&A: *AND, TOWARDS HAPPY ALLEYS*
Film director Sreemoyee Singh conducts interviews with Iranian women artists to show the precarious situation that critics of the regime find themselves in, including the constant threat of imprisonment and being banned from practicing their profession. The screening will be followed by a Q&A with Singh.
IFC Theatre
323 6th Ave
MNHTN

FRI APR 19 • 6:30PM • FREE
HONEY, I QUEERED THE NARRATIVE BOOK CLUB
This month’s book will be a discussion of

Ten Bridges I’ve Burnt: a Memoir in Verse written by Brontez Purnell.
MCNALLY JACKSON DT BK
445 Albee Square
BKLYN

SAT APR 20 • 10AM–3PM • FREE
116 W 134TH ST
Harlem Grown’s Earth Day Festival welcomes community members back to the 134th St. Farm as a new growing season begins. The festival includes activities such as papier-mâché arts and crafts, nutritious cooking demonstrations with mushrooms and kale grown on our farms, music and dance, and more. More information can be found at harlemgrown.org.
HARLEM GROWN: 134TH ST. FARM
116 W. 134th St.
MNHTN

FRI APR 26 • 10AM–6PM • FREE
BLACK COMIC BOOK FESTIVAL
The Black Comic Book Festival marks 12 years of uniting animators, bloggers, cosplay lovers, fans, families, illustrators, independent publishers and writers to celebrate Black comic books, graphic novels, and cartoon enthusiasts This event will feature panel discussions, workshops, and cosplay showcases, and highlights the work of creators from across the country.
SCHOMBURG CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN BLACK CULTURE
515 Malcolm X Blvd
MNHTN

WED MAY 1
INTERNATIONAL WORKERS DAY
Happy May Day! Protest everywhere. Stay tuned for protest updates and coverage of May Day on Indypendent Twitter and Instagram.

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Amy Goodman



Juan González



Nermeen Shaikh

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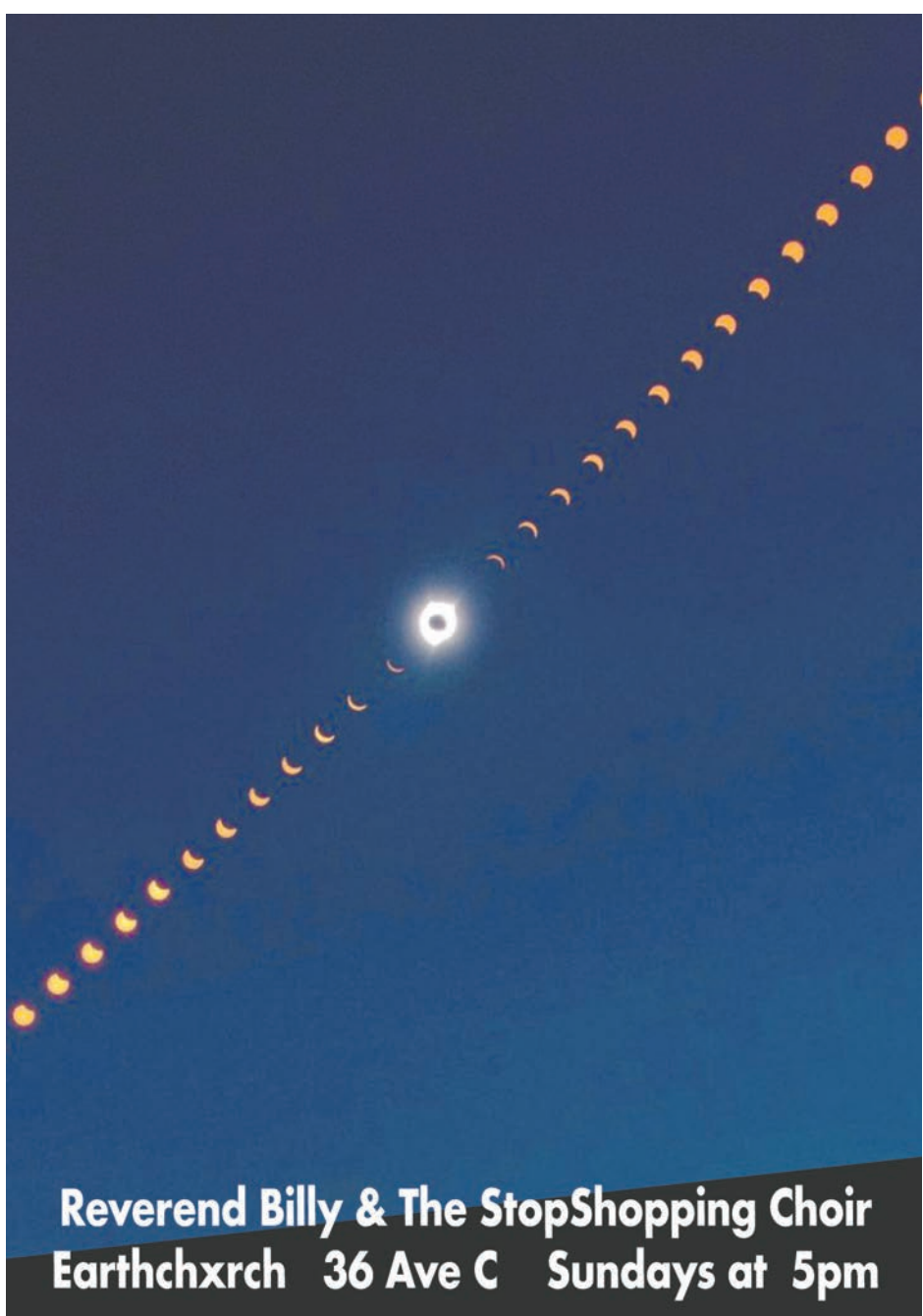


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Reverend Billy & The StopShopping Choir
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ARIANA OROZCO

'IT'S GOING TO CHANGE EVERYTHING'

BRONX MED SCHOOL STUDENTS REACT TO FREE TUITION ANNOUNCEMENT

BY ARIANA OROZCO

The cost of attending medical school saddles most students with hundreds of thousands of dollars in debts and can restrict their career choices. For students at the Albert Einstein School of Medicine, that all changed in late February when Ruth Gottesman, chair of the school's board of trustees, announced a \$1 billion donation to the Bronx-based school. That money will be used to cover student tuition, making it free for all students beginning in the 2024-2025 school year. *The Independent* spoke with students to see how they feel about this major shift.

The following interviews have been edited for length and clarity.

KUSH D.
Third Year

How is free tuition going to change your life?

So I'm a rising fourth year, and I kind of have to pick a specialty now. So it's actually playing a large bearing on what I get to pick, because I'm not limited by specialties that are lower paying, or specialties that are, like, oversaturated because of concern that I had to pay off debt. It's going to make a bigger difference for lowerclassmen. It's definitely improved my mood, and the vibe on campus is so much better. I think I'm more excited to start my journey as a doctor now.

SARAH J.
Third Year

How is free tuition going to change your life?

Well, I'm going into pediatrics, which is usually one of the lower-paying specialties. And I was always going to go into pediatrics because it's what I love, but you have to also understand that you're taking on a potentially larger financial burden, or it might take longer to pay off your debt. And so this is definitely going to take a significant amount of that future stress away.

RACHEL S.
First Year

How is free tuition going to change your life?

I feel like now I have less stress on myself in terms of

ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE:

Bailey C. and Rachel S. are first-year students at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine.

FOR THE KIDS: Sarah J. is going to go into pediatrics "because it's what I love."

how I need to budget my money. I was very, very much allocating the loans I was currently taking out in a specific way to be able to survive and buy food and other essentials. But now having free tuition I can take out less loans and be less stressed out in the future about what debt I have, so I feel a little bit less financially burdened.

AARON H.
Second Year

How is free tuition going to change your life?

I'm going to be a third-year student next year, so it's going to cut my tuition by almost a half. So half my loans are now gone. It's an amazing gift. Thank you Dr. Grossman for that. It's an amazing school and if anyone wants to come here, now there's an extra reason to do so.

BAILEY C.
First Year

How is free tuition going to change your life?

Oh my God! I just think it's going to change everything. I come from a low-income family, and so now I have the freedom to kind of do whatever I want with my career and my future, and go anywhere I want. It's super exciting.

What are you thinking of going into now?

I still have no idea. But, now I don't have to worry about going into the super-competitive, high-paying specialties. I can explore more things I want to do, or careers that I think better serve people but aren't good for debt.

JASON J.
First Year

How is free tuition going to change your life?

It's taken a huge weight off my shoulders. I think the financial stress was something that I was thinking about constantly with every purchase I was making, whether it was just ordering food, or going out with friends. I kind of don't have to worry about that anymore. It's good to just focus on school and just enjoy medical school!



ARIANA OROZCO



DEATH BY A THOUSAND CUTS

COMMUNITY LEADERS UNITE TO SAVE A STRONGHOLD OF BROOKLYN HEALTH CARE

BY ARIANA OROZCO

When Redetha Abrahams-Nichols started as a nurse at SUNY Downstate University Hospital in Brooklyn in the 1990s, she did so to work in the community that she grew up in. She was one of the first nurses to work in the hospital's new emergency room, an addition that was meant to stabilize its finances and provide much-needed extra care to low-income and uninsured patients in East Flatbush and all over Central Brooklyn. Staff came, staff left, but Abrahams-Nichols continued on, serving over 100,000 patients.

Abrahams-Nichols is now president of the Downstate chapter of United University Professionals (UUP), the union that represents most of the medical staff at the hospital. In her 27-year career, she has seen the number of Brooklyn hospitals shrink significantly. In 2008 Victory Memorial Hospital in Bay Ridge, nicknamed “the baby hospital” for its maternity ward, shut down. (Maimonides Medical Center opened a standalone emergency room on the site in 2023.) In 2014 Long Island College Hospital in Cobble Hill succumbed to financial distress. Kingsbrook Jewish Hospital in East Flatbush, consolidated into the Brooklyn One Health chain in an attempt to save it, stopped admitting patients in 2021 and closed last fall.

With the loss of those hospitals, Downstate Hospital, affiliated with the State University of New York's Downstate Medical School, provides crucial services, says Assemblywoman Phara Souffrant Forrest, a former nurse who represents central Brooklyn. “I’ve been a patient at SUNY Downstate many times,” she explains. “I used to work at Kings County and shuttled my patients over to Downstate when we didn’t have a particular specialty, especially in pediatrics, that wasn’t available at Kings County.” Downstate is Brooklyn’s designated regional perinatal center, for dealing with high-risk pregnancies and births.

In addition to world-class pediatrics, SUNY Downstate has the only kidney-transplant center in Brooklyn. It is the only medical center in the borough that offers education, research and patient care. It has contributed to global research by helping to develop and maintain BioBAT, a wet-lab space where biotechnology startups can perform live experiments as opposed to computer simulations. In 2020, it was transformed into a COVID-only hospital for a year, providing life-saving care to thousands of patients. It has done all that while providing care for many of Brooklyn’s Black, brown, uninsured and Medicare/Medicaid patients.

So when SUNY Chancellor John King announced a proposal in January to close Downstate and move some of its beds to Kings County Hospital across the street, community members were outraged. King and Governor Kathy Hochul have argued that the hospital is

SAVE OUR HOSPITAL: Hundreds of staff and community members rallied outside SUNY Downstate Hospital on Feb. 29.

FIGHTING FOR A REPRIEVE: State Senator Zellnor Myrie (D-Brooklyn) speaks at the Feb. 29 rally.

crumbling under a \$100 million annual deficit. However, multiple sources told *The Independent* that their investigation of hospital records showed the deficit to be closer to \$40 million.

The proposed plan scatters services across Brooklyn. The state has suggested opening a kidney center at Kings County, but according to Abrahams-Nichols, that hospital is already overcrowded. She estimates that on March 5 its emergency room had 80 patients sitting “without beds on the floor. The wait time was over 12 hours.”

The closure plans are based on the average rate of hospital-bed utilization, but do not take into account potential disasters like the COVID-19 pandemic when the extra capacity is desperately needed. Chancellor King’s suggestion that Downstate’s site be turned into “affordable housing” is even more dubious: Long Island College Hospital and Victory’s properties were both sold off primarily to private real-estate developers.

SUNY Downstate’s financial issues began in 2001, when the state stopped paying for its workers’ fringe benefits. In 2012, former Gov. Andrew Cuomo proposed its first budget restructuring, but that proposal was swiftly defeated after objections from the UUP, New York State United Teachers and the Public Employees Federation unions. The hospital’s current economic struggles are a direct result of the year it spent as a COVID-only hospital — when staff were shouldering thousands of patients but not seeing —adequate Medicaid and Medicare reimbursements. Governor Hochul has not increased funding for Medicaid reimbursements.

New York State Sen. Zellnor Myrie, whose district encompasses SUNY Downstate, has galvanized the legislative effort to create a sustainability plan for SUNY Downstate and One Brooklyn Health that includes adequately paying “safety-net hospitals” —those that serve a high proportion of poor and uninsured patients — for the services they provide.

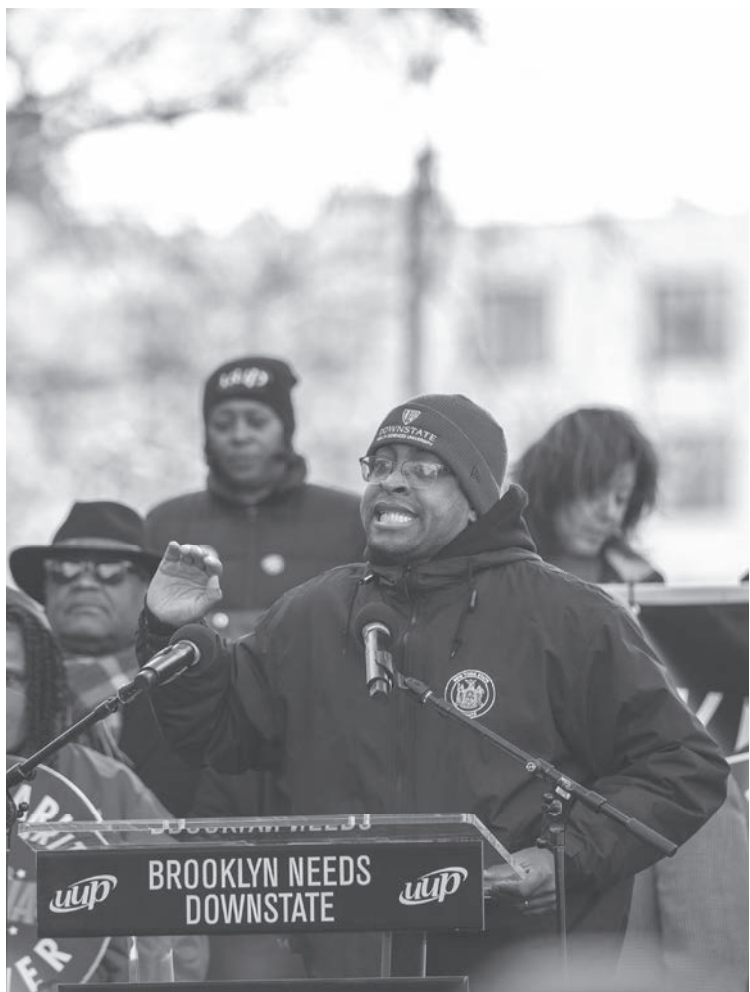
“This vote happened last year at the end of session was 62-0 on this bill, on a sustainability plan for Downstate,” Sen. Myria told *The Independent*. “So not only every single member of the Democratic conference, but every single Republican voted for it.”

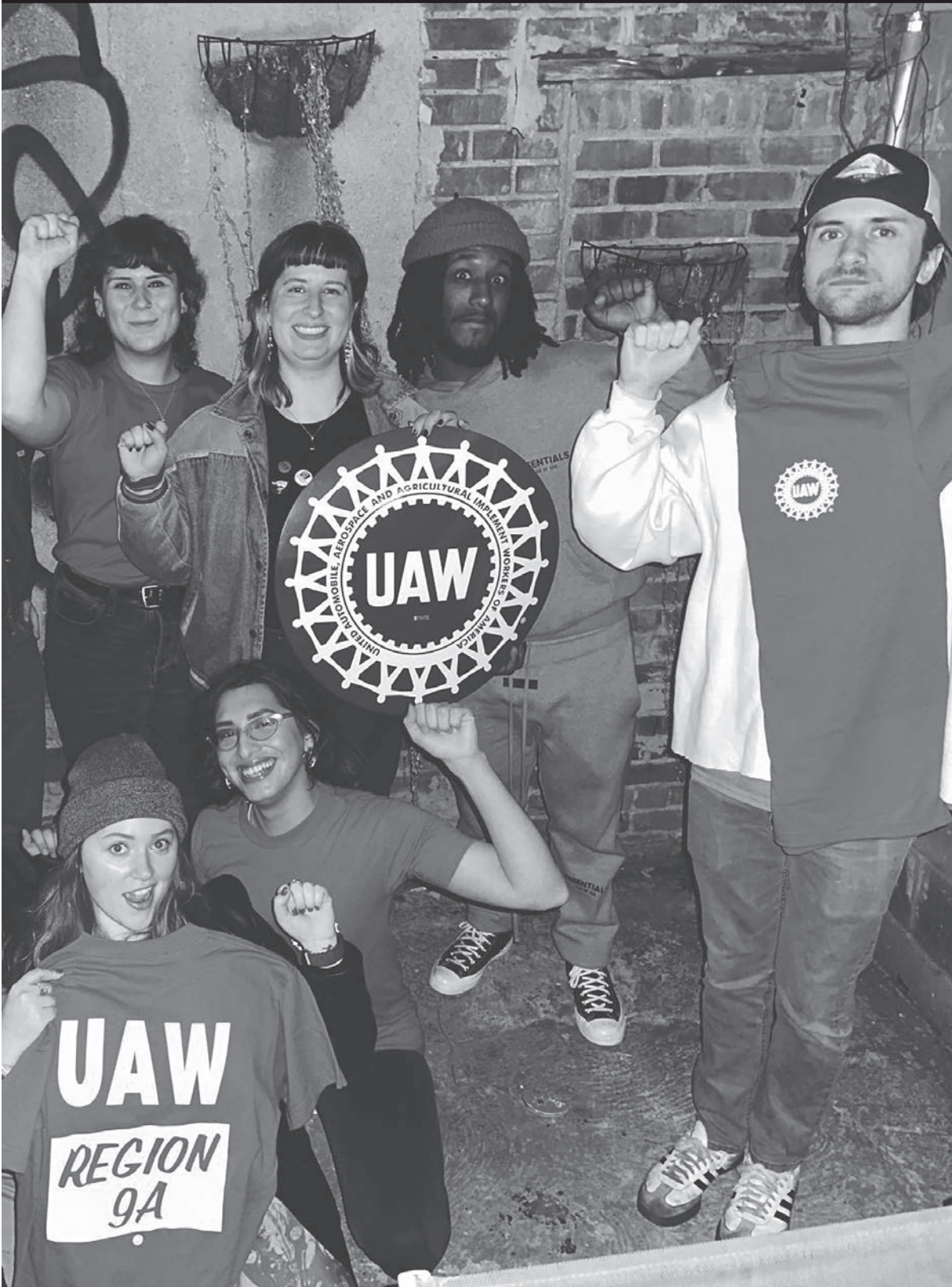
He says he is optimistic about a similar consensus as the April 1 budget deadline looms. This year’s bill includes a provision about the need for more community input, since Chancellor King did not host any town halls in the community before announcing the hospital’s closing.

Sen. Myrie has also signed onto a bill sponsored by Sen. Gustavo Rivera of the Bronx that would increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for safety net hospitals. In New York, Medicaid reimbursement rates have increased only marginally since 2008, while the cost of health care has increased by 43%.

In early March, nearly 1,000 people, including hospital staff, union leaders, community members, clergy, elected officials and other supporters, gathered for a rally in front of Downstate Hospital, demanding not only that it be kept open, but that it be better funded.

Sen. Jabari Brisport, who represents a central Brooklyn district, says the hospital’s value extends far beyond whether it can turn a profit: “We don’t say our libraries, our post offices or our roads have operating deficits. We don’t consider them businesses; we consider them public social goods.”





NITEHAWK WORKERS UNION



AMBA GUERGIERIAN



MOSES JEANFRANCOIS

UNION S

ZOOMERS AND MILLENNIALS WANT TO

SERVICE SECTOR JOBS INTO STABLE, G

THEY ARE WINNING VICTORIES ONCE T

By Amba Guerguerian

Workers at 400 Starbucks stores across the country have won union elections. On Feb. 27, after more than two years of union-busting campaigns and stalling on negotiations, the company announced it would begin to bargain in good faith with the Starbucks Workers United union. It also promised to grant raises and benefits to the unionized shops, which it has been illegally denying.

On March 19, Starbucks said it would begin bargaining in late April with workers from the unionized stores nationally, instead of store by store. That day, workers at nine more Starbucks stores in eight states filed to have their union recognized.

The workers' main demands include a minimum wage of \$20 per hour, more consistent scheduling and increased staffing levels.

"This is amazing," says worker-organizer Melina Carrasquillo, 26. "I had initially thought coming into this that we were going to be stuck for at least a year or two in limbo, like how it has been for the movement prior to us." She works at a Starbucks in Park Slope that was one of 21 shops that launched their campaigns together in mid-February.

Labor historian Eric Blanc says the Starbucks campaign might be the most significant win for labor since the 1930s, because "nobody [since then] has shown it's been possible not just to win elections, but to get to a first contract against the biggest corporations in the world in our modern economy."

Factors that might have changed Starbucks' calculations include that it has spent at least \$240 million on union-busting lawyers that failed to stop organizing. It has faced repeated defeats at the federal National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), damage to its "progressive" brand identity, and a shareholder revolt that sought to place three union-friendly directors on the company's board.

Brendan Lopez, a worker-organizer who was fired from a Starbucks in Farmingville, Long Island, told *The Independent* that he thinks an international boycott movement against Starbucks after the company tried to punish the union for its pro-Palestine position played a crucial role in forcing the company's hand.

Whatever the company's intentions were, "we have all been celebrating," says Lopez. "They were sending lawyers to go in and then leave immediately. Lawyers would not even show up in a meeting sometimes to bargain, and if they would show up, they would just be on their phones, or not even pay attention to the meeting, and then they would just leave."

The baristas *The Independent* spoke with, however, remain wary of the company's intentions. It recently entered, along with Amazon and Trader Joe's, in a legal battle started by Elon Musk's SpaceX that seeks to declare the NLRB's power to enforce New Deal-era labor laws that protect workers' right to form unions unconstitutional.

Regardless, this is a sign that the insurgent labor movement is maintaining momentum, says veteran unionist Eric Dirnbach.

"What is management looking for?" he asks. "They're looking for signs that the union momentum is dissipated. If the union momentum were dissipating, they would hold out, they would not reach out for a deal. They're seeing the opposite. They're seeing this not going away, so they're making a business decision."

ORGANIZING IN THE CITY

Since winning its first union election in Buffalo in December 2021, Starbucks Workers United has helped inspire a wave of organizing by younger workers in retail and service industry jobs that were long thought to be impossible to unionize.

Here in New York City, workers at Starbucks, Barboncino pizzeria,

URGE

TURN LOW-WAGE RETAIL AND

GOOD-PAYING UNION JOBS. AND,

THOUGHT IMPOSSIBLE

Death and Co. bar, Hex & Company boardgame cafe, She Wolf Bakery, Housing Works, Greenlight Bookstore, Barnes & Noble, REI, Trader Joe's, Film Forum, Alamo Drafthouse Cinema Lower Manhattan and Nitehawk Cinema have won union elections or begun the process of organizing a union.

Workers in service and retail jobs make up at least 46.3 million of the roughly 160 million people employed in the United States in 2023, according to data from the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. These industries, whose share of the workforce grew after deindustrialization hit the U.S. in the 1970s, have some of the country's lowest unionization rates — between 1.3% and 4.6%.

Downward mobility among millennial and Zoomer workers in the United States has also spurred unionization, as more college-educated workers are finding themselves working in service and retail jobs for years.

"People my age are seeing these jobs that we've been raised to think of as lesser and have low value, that we are now working because the economy is not very good, and then we can sort of get stuck in them," says Esther, 29, a barista at Barnes and Noble.

With high turnover rates and "easily replaceable" jobs, service and retail workers have been considered nearly impossible to organize, but being hailed as "essential workers" who had to endure great risk during the pandemic helped spark a new desire to fight for their rights in the workplace. These occupations, often rife with safety and health hazards and bosses that care more about customer happiness than workers' wellbeing, are proving to be fertile grounds for unionization.

"We are now seeing that that labor is actually incredibly valuable, that it's really hard work, that it's a lot of effort, and that it's not right — not *just* societally — but that these companies treat us like we're just disposable," says Esther, who graduated from a masters program in 2020 with a degree in media archiving and preservation. Unable to find a job in her field, and having worked previously at Starbucks barista, she got a position in the cafe at the Barnes and Noble bookstore on 82nd Street in Manhattan in mid-2023.

Esther was eager to join the union push. "Pay is a big issue for everyone, not being able to afford to live in the neighborhood where we work is something we all came together and said, 'This is not right. Our labor is worth more than what we're being paid,'" she told *The Indy*.

On March 14, 85% of them voted to join the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union. In June, 88% of workers at the Park Slope Barnes and Nobles and 97% at the company's flagship store in Union Square voted to join the same union. They are some of seven stores in the country that have unionized since May 2023.

Alex Dinndorf, 26, who was one of the workers who formed a union at the Barboncino pizzeria in Brooklyn last year and now is an organizer with Workers United, says another reason service workers are particularly motivated to unionize is that "the service economy is becoming more consolidated under corporate restaurant groups," and that that is happening because "all of these restaurants are becoming so expensive to operate."

While workers at local businesses or small chains have faced union-busting tactics, they generally pale in comparison to the anti-union campaigns at Trader Joe's, Starbucks and REI which can afford to pay hundreds of dollars per hour to

lawyers from top-tier law firms that specialize in "union avoidance."

At Nitehawk Cinema Prospect Park in Brooklyn, the local owner aggressively opposed the Nitehawk Workers Union after it went public.

Workers there started organizing last August. "The workers reached out to the Barboncino Union Twitter," said Dinndorf. He supported organizing at Nitehawk as a volunteer with the Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee (EWOC), which formed in 2020 as an organizing tool for workers to fight for better working conditions and form unions at their shops.

Nitehawk, where theatergoers are served food and drinks while they watch movies, "is an absolute factory," Dinndorf says. "The food runners there wear earpieces to communicate," and servers carry "trays of drinks weaving up and down stairs, crouching — the conditions are notoriously bad."

"I had heard stories about Nitehawk and Alamo well before I started organizing anything, and it always had the reputation of a place that was really tough to work at and have no work-life balance" during major film releases, he adds. The Barbie/Oppenheimer double release proved to be "the big catalyzing incident at Nitehawk" that led to the workers' decision to organize.

On March 17, workers voted 51-41 to join United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 2179, with 90% of the staff voting.

"I'm looking forward to hearing from those 41 people that did vote no, so we'll be able to take those grievances and work them out," worker-organizer Lydia told *The Independent*. She said the close vote was "pretty understandable, given mistakes that were made by the organizing committee, as well as the union-busting tactics that were used against our shop." She says that the campaign was the first union experience for "pretty much all" the worker-organizers at Nitehawk.

Nitehawk owner Matthew Viragh, Lydia says, spread misinformation about unions and what might happen at the cinema if a union were to win, as well as rumors about some of the pro-union workers. The UAW filed unfair labor practice charges against Nitehawk for threatening to fire union sup-

"Sure, I love you guys," said one elderly regular, when workers asked him to sign.

"It's so weird that it has to be location by location," added another regular, about the fact that a union can't be won for every franchise at once.

"I did plumbing work for a while and obviously there was a union for a good reason, and fuck these corporates," said a young man who had stopped to sign the petition.

"We're getting a lot more signatures than I expected today," said Starbucks worker-organizer Victoria Blair, 24.

"I've been running in left-wing, trade-unionist, pro-labor circles since I was 13," said Blair. She grew up poor in Texas, moving around from home to home, with a brother with special needs, so she had to learn to advocate for them, and through that, got involved in politics at a young age. "I didn't know at the time that I was queer, but I knew something was different about me — so it was a burning desire to understand why marginalized people are marginalized." That led her to critical analysis of gender and ability, "which leads into critical analysis of the socioeconomic status quo, into Marxist critical analysis."

"I always have been a bit of a firebrand," added Blair.

She moved to Brooklyn in July in part because of the "ongoing persecution of transgender people in Texas," she said. She had tried to unionize the Starbucks she was working at in Arlington, Texas, to little avail and thought she would take another shot at it when she transferred to the Park Slope store.

Melina Carrasquillo, who had been working at the Starbucks for around a year and a half, was itching for someone to start a union campaign there but was nervous to be the one to spearhead it, partially because she was hoping to be promoted to a managerial position.

One day last fall, Blair mentioned her plan to Carrasquil-

WINNERS: Workers from Nitehawk Cinema celebrate after voting to unionize with UAW Local 21-79

COMMUNITY OUTREACH: Workers from the Starbucks on Fourth Avenue and 11th St. in Park Slope table outside their store.

COLLECTIVE POWER: Workers at Hex & Company react last November after winning their union election.

'WE ARE NOW SEEING THAT THAT LABOR IS ACTUALLY INCREDIBLY VALUABLE.'

porters, cut their benefits, and deny them special privileges, all illegal under the National Labor Relations Act.

Standing outside Nitehawk after the election results were announced, Dinndorf, Lydia, another worker and their new union representative from UAW Local 2179 excitedly hugged and shook hands.

The Local 2179 representative, a veteran labor organizer, said he was happy to welcome more movie theaters into the local. "This will be our third theater in a year," he said in a strong New York accent as he smoked a cigarette. "There's Nitehawk, Alamo Theatre and Drafthouse and another one." He said with a sly smile meaning, "It's a new campaign; we can't tell you yet."

"It's incredible to be a part of this enormous mobilization of organized labor that's been happening since the beginning of the COVID pandemic in 2020 with the Amazon Labor Union, as well as Starbucks and Trader Joe's, and even smaller shops, not just in New York City, but across the entire United States," said Lydia.

STICKING IT TO CORPORATE

At a sidewalk tabling event to collect signatures from customers and community members that support the union campaign at the Starbucks on Fourth Avenue and 11th Street in Park Slope, sometimes a queue formed as people waited to sign on one of the two devices available.

lo, who begged her to follow through with it, promising she would help. "I realized the union was more important to me than getting a promotion," said Carrasquillo, who grew up around organized labor because her father is a shop steward at the National Association of Letter Carriers union for postal workers.

"We thought that you show up to any company, and you have to take the rules that are in place, you have to take the injustices and discrimination," Carasquillo told *The Indy*. "But we're coming to a place in our country and generation where we're realizing that we don't have to accept this as the status quo." The union election at her store will take place on March 28.

Brendan Lopez, 23, who was fired from the Farmingville Starbucks last July, was one of the first workers to participate in organizing there.

"I had just started, and someone had written 'Start union now' on the whiteboard in the break room," he recalls. Lopez walked in while an anti-union supervisor was examining the note and yelled at Lopez, saying he would fire whoever was responsible. "My response was, 'If you're gonna yell in my face, I'm gonna go be a part of the union then.'" He started organizing with the worker who had written the note.

Despite gridlocked negotiations, Farmingville Starbucks workers continue to hold regular union meetings. Lopez and other workers also traveled around to different Starbucks

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March/April 2024

THE INDEPENDENT



JOHN TARTLETON

CARCERAL TACTICS OVER TREATMENT

MAYOR RESPONDS TO SUBWAY DISORDER WITH CALL TO GIVE THE NYPD MORE POWER

BY THEODORE HAMM

In response to the March 14 subway at Brooklyn's Hoyt-Schermerhorn station, Mayor Eric Adams offered an instant diagnosis of what sparked the conflict. "When I looked at this tape and broke it down piece by piece and frame by frame, it is clear that it personifies what our pursuit is involved around those with severe mental health illnesses," Adams told NY1.

Video of the incident does not show that Dajuan Robinson, the initial aggressor who then got shot with his own gun, matches the target of the Adams administration's approach to people experiencing mental-health crises.

As Adams announced in late 2022, the focus would be on removing people viewed to be experiencing "delusional misapprehension of their surroundings or their own health." This was commonly understood to refer to homeless people on the subway who appear to be unaware of their physical condition.

Nothing about Robinson's appearance placed him in that category. Whether his aggressive demeanor amounted to "severe mental-health illness" is not for the mayor

to determine.

In 2021, the year Adams was elected, there was significant public attention focused on the need to address widespread mental-health issues, which had been exacerbated by the pandemic. Many activists who backed the call to "defund the police" supported the reallocation of resources to fund various social programs. Organizations including VOCAL-NY sharply criticized mayoral candidate Eric Adams for pushing carceral strategies instead of investing in mental-health initiatives.

Adams, a former police captain, opposed the movement to defund the police, pitching himself as both a supporter and a reformer of the NYPD. Three years later, it's clear that Adams is a knee-jerk backer of the NYPD who has done nothing meaningful in terms of reining in the department's overzealous tactics.

There is evidence that even amid the pandemic crime spike (that propelled Adams' rise), the activists' positions gained traction among Democratic voters. In mid-May 2021, a poll commissioned by the right-wing City Journal found that 47% of city Democrats agreed with a proposal to defund the NYPD and spend that money on social work-

OFF-TRACK: The A train pulls into the Hoyt-Schermerhorn subway station, the site of a March 14 shooting that rattled the city.

ers instead."

Notably, the poll was taken one week after a high-profile shooting in Times Square. Adams' response was to host media events on consecutive days at the crime scene. Fellow candidates Maya Wiley and Dianne Morales called for community investments instead.

During former Mayor Bill de Blasio's administration, there was a sizable allocation of funding for mental-health initiatives. While ThriveNYC — overseen by Chirlane McCray, de Blasio's wife — received close to \$1 billion in funding, it's unclear how all the

money was spent or whether any programs were successful.

Shortly after announcing his initiative to remove people from the subways, Adams cut funding for B-HEARD, a program rolled out in 2021 that brings social workers and EMTs — not cops — to help people experiencing a mental-health emergency. In March 2023 Adams restored funding, but it would be a stretch to say that these issues have been front-and-center on the mayor's agenda.

It's not clear how the remedy Adams proposed in response to the subway shooting — which would involve Albany allowing the city to "involuntarily remove" people experiencing "severe mental illness" — applies to people like Dajuan Robinson. According to his estranged wife, Robinson had no psychiatric condition, although he was known to get angry after drinking alcohol.

Many people who ride the subway late at night or on the weekends might fit into that category. Involuntary removals may be yet another carceral solution to an enduring problem — but that's how the mayor rolls.

UNION SURGE

Continued from page 7

franchises on Long Island to inform other baristas about the union efforts. After he was terminated, Lopez and his co-workers went to Starbucks' corporate offices in Manhattan and marched on the boss for firing a key worker-organizer.

Corporate union-busting has standard tactics: firing organizing workers, threatening to demote or fire them for union activity, promoting misinformation campaigns that claim unions will result in lower pay and benefits and lost jobs, mandatory "captive audience" meetings with anti-union propaganda and veiled threats, and taking down or prohibiting pro-union literature in the break room. If a union wins an election, employers often stall or refuse to bargain a first contract and deny the unionized workers the same raises and benefits it gives other workers, as both Starbucks and REI have done. All those tactics are illegal under federal labor law, but still frequent.

At REI Soho, workers have been denied company-wide raises since they voted to join the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union in March 2022. All the unionized workers in the United States recently found out that they would be denied end-of-year "merit" bonuses.

Carlos Angel-Barajas, 34, an actor with a master's degree in the field, is on the REI Soho bargaining committee. After one year of bargaining, REI changed law firms and hired the notoriously anti-union Morgan Lewis. Now, two years after winning their union election, neither REI Soho workers nor those at eight other recently-unionized stores are anywhere near reaching a deal with the company.

"When we bargained with [the previous firm], there were representatives from REI on the Zoom call," Angel-Barajas recalls. "It was a very slow, at times frustrating, process but there were things that were handled at the bargaining table because REI was present." Now, he says, "it's just the legal team; there are no REI representatives," and not one additional tentative agreement has been made.

Workers at REI stores nationwide have filed more than 80 complaints with the NLRB, seeking to force the company to bargain first contracts.

At the Trader Joe's on Essex and Delancey in Lower Manhattan, bosses approached union-busting in a more creative way. "Trader Joe's doesn't have to hire professional union busters to come in — they are just using the employees to do that work," says labor lawyer Seth Goldstein.

After losing a union election in a 76-76 tie last spring, workers continued to organize, and the boss continues to hire anti-union workers that have formed an unofficial union-busting clan, says independent union Trader Joe's United.

Things came to a head in February when Fredd Moore, a queer pro-union worker, was fired on what the union says are trumped-up claims after being called homophobic slurs by one of the anti-union workers.

"They truly believe that if we get a union, we will lose our jobs," said worker-organizer Jordan Pollack of the anti-union group.

The union's legal team, Julian, Mehrer, Singla and Goldstein, has filed an unfair-labor-practice charge against Moore's firing. It has also appealed the election results and is hoping to have them overturned under the precedent set in the NLRB's Cemex ruling last August, which stipulates that if management illegally interfered with an election, the employer will be ordered to recognize the union, rather than having to redo the election.

Workers at Amazon's JFK8 warehouse on Staten Island, the only unionized Amazon warehouse in the United States, faced a grueling anti-union campaign, with workers forced to sit through several captive-audience meetings before the April 2022 union election, which the Amazon Labor Union won. Amazon also fired several union leaders before and after the election. It has not yet begun to negotiate a contract.

The independent Amazon Labor Union also has internal problems. There has been a split between union president Chris Smalls and his supporters, and some of the union's organizers who came from outside and took jobs as "salts" at the JFK8 warehouse to build support for the union. JFK8 workers recently voted to have direct elections for their leadership which will be held in the coming months. Meanwhile, the 1.3-million member Teamsters union vowed to organize Amazon after winning a strong contract from UPS last summer.

Labor organizers and union lawyers have been sounding the alarm as the world's richest men fight against the labor movement by attempting to destroy the NLRB's power to enforce the National Labor Relations Act. The law, enacted in 1935, protects the rights of private-sector workers to unionize and engage in other "concerted activity." In June, Starbucks followed Trader Joe's and Amazon making legal filings that support SpaceX's argument in a lawsuit claiming that the NLRB's administrative process for hearing cases violates its constitutional due-process rights.

"This is just a blatant attack on the labor movement for their success in organizing," says labor lawyer Seth Goldstein.

MAINTAINING MOMENTUM

"I was a socialist in the '90s. It was very hard; there were like five of us in the meetings," labor organizer Eric Dirnbach told *The Indy*. Now, he attends packed meetings full of excited young labor organizers and socialists.

New unions and militant union-support networks like the Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee are paving the way for effective worker-to-worker organizing, and well-established unions like the Teamsters and the UAW have been revitalized by grassroots pro-democracy campaigns.

EWOC, a joint, volunteer-run project between the United Electrical Workers union and the Democratic Socialists of America, says it has around 500 currently active organizing

volunteers; that over 5,200 workers have reached out to it since its founding; and that of these, over 2,100 campaigns have been launched with some organizing activity, representing workers at over 1,500 employers.

Younger people are gaining class consciousness, after more than 40 years of declining economic conditions for workers. We are paying more than ever for higher education, housing, groceries, health care and more, while the share of wealth controlled by the richest 1% continues to grow.

"I think for our generation, a promise was made about working hard, getting an education, buying a house. We saw examples of it by our parents and grandparents," says Angel-Barajas, "and it turned out to be empty."

Gay and transgender people, particularly those of color, face high rates of workplace discrimination and harassment. At Starbucks, Trader Joe's, REI and Nitehawk, queer workers are leading the way.

Angel-Barajas is queer and was undocumented for much of his life. "I, along with a bunch of my coworkers, are uniquely tuned into systems of oppression, and we're tuned into methods, tactics, for those in power to control," they said. "And I've seen how powerfully folks in the store will fight for one another. It's difficult work, but it's also very important and transformative."

Workers are becoming aware that they cannot fix working conditions by just changing jobs. "I come from a line of horrible work experience. I have yet to find a job that has a good management, a good foundation for its workers," says Lopez. "I know what it feels like to be an ant underneath a shoe, and it's not a good feeling that you can be replaced by any other worker ant, and you'll just be another squashed bug on the side of the road."

Lopez says another reason he hasn't given up is because he has a whole new community of friends and support through the union. "I'm constantly asking everybody new I meet, 'If you ever need a union, let me know.'"

Millennials and Zoomers grew up in a time when union membership was at its lowest ebb in generations in the United States, and knowledge about unions and labor issues was slim or nonexistent. None of the workers I spoke with for this article remember being taught much of anything about organized labor and its history. We heard snippets about it during Occupy Wall Street, the Fight for \$15, Bernie Sanders' presidential campaigns and the Chicago teachers strikes. In March 2020, when Amazon workers bucked at Jeff Bezos, then the richest man in the world, we were ready to follow suit.

For advice about how to build power in your workplace, contact the Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee at organizeworkers.org.

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NYC STANDS WITH GAZA

More than five months into Israel's live-streamed genocide in Gaza, New Yorkers continue to protest for Palestinian lives and freedom on a near-daily basis. The tactics and the targets vary from holding mass demonstrations and blocking the route of a presidential motorcade to taking over iconic cultural institutions and publishing a mock paper called The New York War Crimes. The Independent's photo team has been there every stop of the way covering what may be the most unrelenting protest movement in U.S. history.

— INDYPENDENT STAFF



Protesters simultaneously blocked the Brooklyn, Manhattan and Williamsburg bridges and the Lincoln Tunnel on the morning of Jan. 8.

The keffiyeh has become a global symbol of support for Palestine.

Abdullah Akl of Within Our Lifetime gives a child the mic during a protest.



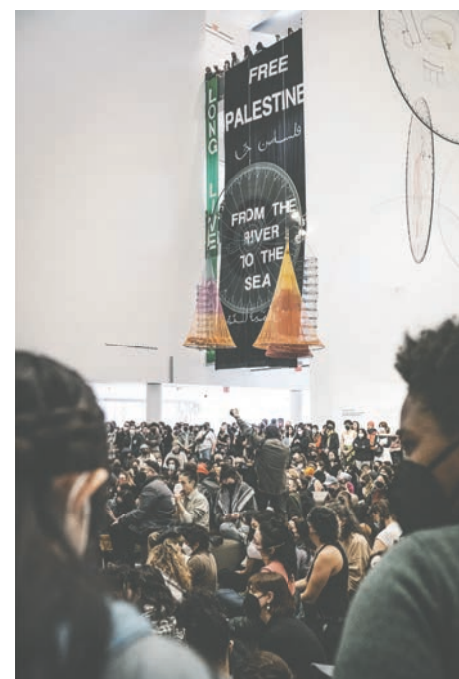
Nerdeen Kiswani of Within Our Lifetime speaks at a protest on International Women's Day.

Demonstrators join hands to unfurl a banner.



A Palestinian flag flies at a protest outside the Oculus transportation hub at the World Trade Center.

Support for Palestine is particularly high among youth.



Anti-war demonstrators share a watermelon – a resistance symbol because its green, red and black colors match those of the Palestinian flag.

A protester is arrested for unpermitted use of a bullhorn.

Pro-Palestine protesters take over the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) on Feb. 10.



An alarmed New York Times employee walks by protesters in the lobby of the NYT's Midtown headquarters on March 14.

An elderly woman waves a Palestinian flag at a protest in the Bronx.

Protesters rally on Feb. 22 outside AIPAC's Midtown headquarters.



COURTESY

NO TESTS, NO GRADES

THE BROOKLYN FREE SCHOOL MAKES ITS OWN RULES

BY KEATING ZELENKE

During free time after algebra class, a group of boys at Brooklyn Free School crowd around a table in their classroom. They're all between the ages of 7 and 12, and form the school's middle cohort.

In front of them on the table, there's a plastic arena for battling Beyblades, little toy tops that crash into each other when you spin them. Just a few weeks earlier, these toys were at the center of a debate at the school. Some people wanted to limit their use in the classroom, arguing that the toys were disruptive or that lower-income students couldn't afford to buy them and participate.

Instead of banning the toys, the students and staff at Brooklyn Free School (BFS) held democratic meetings to talk through the best way to address the great Beyblade affair. Eventually they came to the agreement that students could only bring in their Beyblades from home to play with and battle each other on Tuesdays. During the rest of the week, the students are permitted to construct their own Beyblades with the school's Lego bricks.

"Other schools wouldn't allow you to have Beyblades at all," one student says while clipping a new piece onto his creation. "So we're really grateful."

BFS students work with their peers to create rules that foster a welcoming, productive environment for all, learning about democracy through action. As a product of the free-school movement, BFS, founded in 2003 and now located in Bedford-Stuyvesant's Restoration Plaza, is quite literally a school by kids, for kids. There are no tests or grades, and the rules are decided through democratic meetings in which everyone — staff and students — can speak their mind. Students are also able to determine their own schedules and which subjects they'd like to learn about.

"This is a space that allows for students to have a voice," said Monique Scott, the school's executive director. "It's a place where students are really expected to have a say in their education."

The many posters on the classroom walls include the life cycle of a creek trout, this week's schedule, important Black historical figures — and one handwritten in marker that reads "Fundraising Ideas." The suggestions

range from holding a rummage sale to getting the attention of YouTube personality MrBeast.

Lately, the school's weekly meetings have been about more than which play to perform this year or whether students would be interested in adding a philosophy class. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the students, whose ages range from 4 to 17, have come face-to-face with a much more existential question: How can they make sure BFS survives to see the next school year?

• • •

LUIS CASTILLO'S SON Max enrolled in BFS earlier this school year. Max had attended a relatively progressive public elementary school prior to COVID-19, but when it came time for him to advance to sixth grade, the Castillos couldn't find a satisfactory public middle school. Both Luis and his wife Begonia are from Spain, and went through public school themselves. Having to pay for their son's education had not been a part of their plans.

"I promised Max when he was very young that we would never put him in a school that is all about exams and grades, and all that," Luis Castillo said. He and Begonia were determined to make good on that promise, and Max just wasn't flourishing in the traditionally competitive and individualistic public-school environment.

The Castillos first heard about Brooklyn Free School years before while they were involved in the Occupy Wall Street movement. As they learned more it, they realized BFS was exactly the kind of community learning space they'd been looking for. They also found out about its sliding-scale tuition and discovered that with a reduced price, they could afford to get Max the education they promised him. Now, Luis and Begonia teach Spanish once a week as volunteers.

Max has grown to like subjects he previously hated, thanks to the way the staff teach. "He never liked math before," Castillo said. But within Max's first month at BFS, "he arrived home saying he loved algebra."

• • •

SIDE-BY-SIDE: Brooklyn Free School students and staff engage in democratic decision-making and problem solving.

RELATIVELY AFFORDABLE TUITION is part of the school's commitment to social justice. In the past, the cost of attending BFS was as high as \$33,000 per school year, but they recently lowered it to a \$9,000–\$18,000 sliding scale.

The school has been able to afford lower tuition by tapping reserves derived from the sale of the building that was its previous home. However, achieving financial sustainability remains elusive. When it was first established, BFS was located in southern Park Slope, and wealthier families from the neighborhood essentially subsidized the tuition of lower-income families. The school later moved to Clinton Hill, and then to its current home in Bed-Stuy. As a result, the community it served changed.

It has continued to make good on its promise to provide good, affordable alternative education to a wide array of families, but as more of these families skew to the lower end of the sliding tuition scale, making ends meet has become more difficult. The COVID-19 pandemic amplified its financial woes; as many wealthier families left New York City at least temporarily, they took their higher tuition payments with them and haven't come back. The school's enrollment has fallen dramatically, from around 80 students at its pre-COVID peak to the current 34. Only five of those children are in the youngest age group.

"Now we're in a place where to grow, we have to survive, and we're struggling to survive to the end of this year," Monique Scott said. "We know that we can grow, we want to grow, but we have to survive first." She explained that because of its untraditional structure, getting grants and extra funding has been difficult — the school doesn't have grades or test scores to "prove" its success in educating students.

"We need this school to grow," Nadia Ketoure, another BFS parent, said. "Not just me, all of us. Brooklyn, New York needs Brooklyn Free School." Her son Seimy, who is in the same class as Max, also started at BFS last fall after struggling in public school. Ketoure said that Seimy's public-school teachers "put a sticker on him," casting him aside as an unruly child. She knew that wasn't the case; he just needed a different approach than those teachers — likely already spread too thin — were willing to give.

Seimy has responded well to his new learning en-

Continued on page 19



AMBA GUERGUERIAN

NYC BRIEFS

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

HOCHUL ORDERS REVIEW OF WEED 'DISASTER'

With illegal weed shops far outnumbering licensed marijuana retailers in New York, Gov. Kathy Hochul has tapped Office of General Services Commissioner Jeanette Moy to review the state's cannabis licensing system. The governor called that system "a disaster" while speaking to *The Buffalo News* in January. While New York legalized pot in March 2021, the state did not issue any licenses for retailers until November 2022. Since then, it has issued 500, but only 85 legal stores have opened, compared with an estimated 1,500-plus unlicensed pot spots in New York City. The state Office of Cannabis Management has received 7,000 applications for retail, growing and processing licenses since last fall, but only 109 have been issued this year. The process, intended to help people convicted of pot offenses get into the business, was overly burdensome, requiring them to show that they'd run a profitable business, wait for locations selected by the state Dormitory Authority, and raise up to \$1 million from private investors.

NYPD TRIES TO TWITTER-BULLY JUDGES

Four top NYPD officials denounced a state Supreme Court judge on Twitter (X) Feb. 27 after she released a man arrested on felony charges without bail. Chief of Patrol John Chell posted that Acting Supreme Court Justice J. Michelle Sweeting had "set free a predator back into the community, who may be on your next train, or walking the streets of our city, looking for his next victim." The man, Rudell Faulkner, was charged with grand larceny, narcotics possession and fare evasion. He has been arrested 47 times since 1991, mostly on similar charges, and has 28 convictions. Department chief Jeffrey Maddrey, transit chief Michael Kemper and deputy commissioner Kaz Daughtry all shared Chell's post. "It's time for another episode of the 'Revolving Door of NYC Criminal Justice!'" Daughtry added. City Council criminal-justice committee chair Sandy Nurse told *Gothamist* that the posts were "subtle Twitter bullying of judges."

UP IN SMOKE: New York has struggled to implement licenses for weed dispensaries, but Miguel, owner of Indoor Dispensary at 1503 Newkirk Ave., was able to procure one. He says he will soon open a back lounge at his Flatbush business.

NOT JUST THE RENT IS TOO DAMN HIGH

Half of working-age families in New York City aren't making enough money to pay for basic needs on their own, says a United Way of New York City report released March 19. The report, "The True Cost of Living," said that the costs of housing, food, health care, transportation and childcare have risen by 131% since 2000, almost twice the increase in the median income. It said a family with one adult and two school-age children — therefore not needing child care — would need about \$5,000 a month in the Bronx and almost \$8,000 in the southern half of Manhattan. The number of households below that level rose from 36% in 2021 to 50% last year. "Families are finding that between housing, between child care, transportation, it is almost impossible," United Way NYC President Grace Bonilla said.

MTA TO GIVE MAKEOVER TO TWO HISTORIC STATIONS

The MTA is soliciting bids to renovate two of the city's most historic subway stations, both severely run down. It estimates that work on the Chambers Street station, under the Municipal Building, and the 190th Street station in Washington Heights will cost at least \$100 million and take two years. The Chambers Street station, built in 1904 when the subway system opened, has unique artwork, but now almost every column on the J train platform has missing or damaged tiles. The 190th Street station, on the A line, opened in 1932 and is one of the furthest underground in the system. The entrance to its elevators, near Fort Tryon Park, has a distinctive castle-like look. "My sister said it looked like something from the Hobbits," Washington Heights resident Patricia Finnegan told *Gothamist*. The MTA also plans to build ramps and automated doors to make the station wheelchair-accessible.

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DANIEL BECERRIL

WHITE FRIGHT & A CHANGING WORLD

ANTI-IMMIGRANT MOVEMENTS LIKE MAGA ARE FUELED BY A SHARED CONCERN

BY LINDA MARTÍN ALCOFF

Shortly after World War II, the famed French existentialist writer Albert Camus traveled to South America on a South American speaking tour. Camus took the opportunity the trip afforded him to hear local music, visit villages, and observe Santería rituals in person. He recorded his thoughts about these experiences in a fascinating set of travel diaries. While flying over the Brazilian rainforest, Camus wrote:

“The faster the plane flies, the less importance France, Spain, and Italy hold. They were nations, are provinces, and tomorrow, will be the world’s villages. The future is not on our side, and there’s nothing we can do about this irresistible trend.”

Here Camus seems to be experiencing, not a generalized existential anxiety, but a very particular anxiety toward a world he sees just on the horizon, in which non-white people will be dominant not just in numbers, as they have always been, but in power. And this terrifies him. Following soon after the above passage, he writes, “Brazil, with its thin framework of modernity laid over this immense continent teeming with natural and primitive forces, makes me think of a building slowly chewed, bite by bite, by invisible termites. One day the building will collapse, and a small and teeming people, Black, red and yellow, will spread out over the surface of the continent, masked and brandishing spears, ready for the victory dance.”

Donald Trump’s ongoing analogies between animals and immigrants is hardly new, and his sentiments are not, as these passages from Camus indicate, consigned to conservatives. We need to understand today’s political crisis as epochal rather than merely current, and as caused most fundamentally by the slow demise of the modern colonial world system.

The mid-20th century, when Camus penned these lines, was a period of immense anti-colonial ferment, in which the desire for sovereignty swept throughout the formerly colonized areas of the globe. This movement demanded that European claims to rightful control be exposed as ideological mystifications intending to cover over massive theft. Today there is a sense that, not only are Europeans (and Westerners in general) distrusted in the former colonies, but that former colonial subjects are now invading the West and even demanding the right to do so. Increased numbers of non-whites are migrating and cohabiting the spaces that were previously, and comfortably, majority white, including towns, schools,

and workplaces, even governments. Migration is hardly new, of course, but the sense of lost power and declining influence flows from a sense of how societies in the global north are being forced, however slowly, to share their space and their resources, and to revise their own self-understandings.

What is notable is that this loss of dominance is experienced as a crisis. Camus describes it as an impending primitive force that will collapse buildings and replace civilization with spears, although one could also easily imagine, as Camus himself does at times, that the demise of global north domination could produce an outcome of greater peace.

Yet the reasoning behind Camus’s more dire predictions is not a simple false consciousness. Camus says, “the future is not on our side,” and it is clear this is indeed true. It’s not just about changing population distributions, or young cultures versus old ones, but about the change in perspective that is rewriting the script of modern history. The wealth that has accumulated in white majoritarian nations is largely ill-gotten, and the military power these nations have wielded unilaterally against nations in the global south is, on the whole, illegitimate.

The far right is gaining ground throughout North America and Europe, even in liberal countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden, with a centerpiece of anti-immigrant hysteria. Anti-immigrant policies are disentangled from Nazism, as if today’s support for ethnic and religious exclusions, and fortified border walls, are rational and justifiable in contrast to those of times past. There is so much public support for the Replacement Theory—the idea that white majorities are being purposefully replaced—that journalists today are calling it part of the new mainstream. No matter the facts about the low rates of criminal behavior, or the advantages to national economies hard-working migrants bring: broad publics are as terrified today as Camus was in 1948. And rightly so.

The historian Jason Sokol describes white Southern reaction to the civil rights movement thusly: “There goes my everything.”

This is a crisis of white identity with two parts: a narrative crisis and a legitimization crisis.

The narrative crisis is caused by challenges to the official histories, challenges that cannot be answered and so can only be censored. And the legitimization crisis questions the way nation states were formed, the legitimacy of their borders, and their outsized control of global wealth and power. Certainly, many today in the global north recognize the carnage wrought by European and U.S. wars. But there seems to be a

FRONTIER JUSTICE: A mounted Border Patrol agent chases down Haitian migrants near their encampment in Del Rio, Texas in September 2021.

widely held belief that European supremacy may well be flawed, but that, as Churchill said of democracy, it still beats the alternative. Ongoing political chaos and mayhem in many parts of the global south is viewed as proof of this dictum. Hence, the end of Western world dominance is taken to spell impending world chaos.

Jared Taylor, a thought leader for the far right, explains that his desire for segregation is simply based on a preference for homogeneity. But tellingly, he also argues that only separatism can guarantee white safety and survival. Being one among others in a multiracial world can only lead to tribal conflict.

Thomas Jefferson thought the same way. Although Jefferson denounced slavery as an abomination, and predicted the inevitability of its demise, he believed that enslaved people would have to be shipped back to Africa, forthwith, at the expense of the U.S. government. There could be no functional democracy that included former enslavers with the formerly enslaved. He wrote that “deep-rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained...will divide us into parties and produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race.”

Jefferson was not alone in his pessimism, and it remains strong today. Neither Europe nor North America has sought to develop political cultures that could address the differences of historical experience, outlook, and injury. Despite the fact that millions of whites have long histories of injustice as well at the hands of their governments, and despite the fact that multiple groups share an intense economic precarity today, elites have no interest in addressing the actual ways in which common ground might be forged, or a realistic plan for a shared security.

We need some political therapy.

A decolonial approach to racism will give us a more honest and thorough understanding of the current crisis. Overcoming the far right extremist threats of fascism cannot be successful by reinstating the kind of liberal democratic regimes that seek to protect at all costs the hegemony of the current, global economic order. White reaction to the existential threats that target the myths of our nation states recognize, correctly and presciently, that the current radical reconstructions of national historical narratives call for more sweeping structural change at both the political and the economic level. On these points we might actually be able to build a shared understanding, from which to craft a shared vision for a different and more just future. This vision, however, will have to produce common interests, rather than assume they are already there. And it will have to forego the desire for a return to the past.

This is an excerpt from Race & Racism: A Decolonial Approach by Linda Martín Alcoff, forthcoming from Oxford University Press.



PHOTOGRAPH BY ANTHONY

PROTECT THE WEAK

AN OPEN LETTER TO BLACK AND LATINO MEN VOTING FOR TRUMP

BY NICHOLAS POWERS

Dear Brothers,

“Oh, Trump wasn’t that bad.” I saw my neighbor hold court on the stoop. “Had money in my pocket. Hell, half the time he told the truth!” He and two friends, all Black men, belly laughed. One said, “And the other half?” The Trump lover made an I-got-caught gesture with his palms, “Well...”

They guffawed loudly. I walked and rubbed my temples. I heard this before. I have heard it on stoops and in barbershops and bars. I heard you laugh off the Trump years. I heard you openly talk of voting for Trump. When asked why, you say, “I’m broke under Biden. Trump made it rain.”

It’s not about money. Trump was fun. He cheats on his wife. He does not give a fuck about pronouns. He kinda said COVID-19 was a conspiracy. You kinda believe it was. He threatened to nuke North Korea. He’s an honest liar. So he’s bat shit crazy, racist. Ok. Better than Democrats, Obama included, who talk like politically correct robots.

The media sniffed you out. *The New York Times*, MSNBC and *The Washington Post* run articles about you. What if you do vote for Trump? Or do not vote at all? Since the presidential election is decided by tens of thousands in swing states, you could be the kingmaker. You could decide the fate of the world. Please read that sentence again.

You could decide the fate of the world.

Has anyone told you that yet? You literally hold the lives of people you have not met in your hands. Your vote means the difference between the old and the poor getting Social Security and welfare or being cut off. Imagine a family sleeping in a car. Imagine an old woman going hungry to afford medicine. Your vote decides whether the United States builds more solar panels, electric cars and curbs CO2, or if global warming drowns cities and people flee with their lives in bags. Your vote decides if we can vote. Imagine Trump closing polling stations and requiring hard-to-get ID’s until voting is an impossible gauntlet. Imagine Republicans losing an election but refusing to give up power. Imagine seeing the military in the streets, guns in hand, enforcing the new order.

Has anyone told you how important you are to the future? Has anyone said to you that we need you? We need you to protect the weak.

THE ‘WOKING’ CLASS

We need you to protect the weak because no one else will. The Democrats lie. I know you know this.

Democrats love, just love, the moral high ground. Ever listen to them? Jesus fucking Christ. They sell the greatest hits of social justice rhetoric like late-night Power Rock commercials, “This collection is not sold in stores.” Remember “re-imagining policing” during the George Floyd protests or “safe spaces” or just add whatever adjective to “equity” or “justice” and hocus pocus, a star is born!

You are done with it. You see the game is rigged and they rigged it. Sure white liberals show up to protest racism but send their kids to private schools or cock-block school integration. Our kids are taught by overworked and underpaid staff. I see my son’s teachers palm their eyes and sigh. Many quit to find better pay. Yes, white liberals talk of Martin Luther King Jr. like the Second Coming of Christ but swiftly block attempts to build low cost housing in their leafy suburbs.

They are fucking hypocrites. They love the “woking” class not the working class. They love MSNBC Blacks and Latinos but not us, not the living breathing ones who make a dollar out of 15 cents.

We need you to protect the weak and vulnerable. The ones left behind. I think you know them too. Maybe a brotha caught in a revolving door between the street and jail I know, I do. I give him dap walking back from the bodega. Late at night on the stoop, he showed me shiny scars under his shirt. He told me in a shaking voice, how he got shot by a crew. Suddenly, he leaves. I watch him walk into the night, lost in the dark.

I know you. I know one reason you are voting for Trump is because you never, never want to be as vulnerable as that homeless, scarred brother. You never want to be dependent on others. You want control of your destiny. You want that money.

Instead of protecting the weak, you are running as fast as you can to have power. Even if that means supporting a racist. Even if that means electing Trump.

BULLIES

We need your strength. We really do. I don’t think you hear that enough. I think, hermanos, you hear the opposite.

Liberals love your trauma. They want your sob story.

TRUMP, AGAIN?: Working-class Black and Latino men are likely to be a pivotal swing vote in November’s presidential election.

They love to make movies where you are slaves or ghetto kids who need a white teacher to believe in them. They love seeing you as a victim.

That is why Trump is appealing. He is no one’s victim. He can do whatever the fuck he wants to whoever he wants, whenever he wants. Stiff his workers? Sure. Have sex with porn stars while his wife is pregnant? Done. Sell bullshit to idiots? Easy money.

Can I tell you a secret about Strong Men types? Whether it is Putin, Trump or Trujillo? Strong men are not strong. They are bullies. They attack the poor. They attack women and gays and workers. They will attack you too.

Trump, the Republicans and the whole MAGA crew are bullies. Rich men in nice suits passing tax cuts for the wealthy and dismantling unions while scapegoating easy targets like trans people who are less than 1% of the population.

Trump is selling you a lie. Please hermanos, take it from me. *Ese hombre está lleno de mierda*. I am a New Yorker. I see tourists getting sold fake goods all the time. I know a hustle when I see it.

What fake goods is he selling now? That immigrants are your enemy. They’re not. They are families, scared and running from death. We have enough room. America is immense. Purple mountain majesties. Windswept valleys. We have the space. We have work that needs to get done. New roads, new buildings, new energy grids. We need immigrants. Welcome them.

PROTECT THE WEAK

We need you. Please, we need you to do the right thing. I know being strong is fueled by a fear of being weak. Fear can blind us. Fear can make us hurt those who have less than we do. Fear can make us into bullies

We need you to protect us. What you do in the voting booth matters. You have the lives of people in your hands. You can give life or death.

I know. It is a lot to put on you. I am asking you to turn away from the fun choice. I am asking you to set aside qualms about LGBTQ people or immigration. I am asking you to take responsibility for the lives of people you never met.

I am asking you to be a man.



JOURNALISTS, MARTYRS

HASSOUNEH SALIM & SARI MANSOUR Nov. 18

Hassouneh Salim, a Palestinian freelance photo-journalist, and Sari Mansour, director of the Quds News Network were friends and work colleagues. They were killed together during an Israeli airstrike on the Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza.



AYAT KHADOURA Nov. 20

Khadoura, a Palestinian freelance journalist and podcast presenter shared videos on social media about the situation in Gaza, including a video titled “My Last Message to the World” posted on Instagram on Nov. 6. “We had big dreams,” said Khadoura, “but our dream now is to be killed in one piece so they know who we are.” She was killed alongside an unknown number of her family members in an Israeli airstrike on her home in Beit Lahya in northern Gaza.



OLA ATALLAH Dec. 9

On Nov. 27 Atallah, a freelance Palestinian journalist, wrote an article for the Al-Morasel website about life in Gaza during the war, describing the destruction and damage to her neighborhood and city. “Trees and university buildings fell, journalists and doctors disappeared, and hospitals fell silent. Everything changed in Gaza City, even the faces of its residents. Mirrors no longer know us and we do not know them,” she wrote. Atallah was well-known on social media, and her last tweet on December 8 asked, “How many more nights of terror and death does Gaza have to count?” She and nine members of her family were killed in an Israeli airstrike on the home where they were taking shelter in the El-Daraj area of Gaza City.



AHMED SHEHAB Oct. 10

A journalist for Sowt *Al-Asra Radio* (Radio Voice of the Prisoners), Shehab dedicated his life’s work to giving Palestinian prisoners a voice behind bars, reporting on news such as hunger strikes performed by prisoners against punishment of solitary confinement. Shehab, his wife and their three children were killed by an Israeli airstrike on his house in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip.

SAMER ABU DAQQA Dec. 15

Daqqa joined Al Jazeera in June 2004 as a cameraman and editor. While reporting near Farhana school in Khan Younis, Daqqa — along with Wael Dahdou, bureau chief of *Al Jazeera* in Gaza City — were attacked by an Israeli air strike. “Following Samer’s injury, he was left to bleed to death for over give hours, as Israeli forces prevented ambulances and rescue workers from reaching him, denying the much-needed emergency treatment,” reported *Al Jazeera*.



SALAM MEMA Oct. 10

Mema was the head of the Women Journalists Committee at the Palestinian Media Assembly, an organization committed to advancing media work for Palestinian women journalists. Her body was recovered from the rubble three days after her home in Jabalia was hit by an Israeli airstrike. Her three children and her husband were also killed alongside Mema.

MOHAMMED ATALLAH Jan. 29

Atallah was a 24-year-old Palestinian editor and writer for the local Al-Resalah news site and a writer for the regional independent website Raseef22. Ayman Sharrouf, Raseef22’s political editor, told CPJ that Atallah “was particularly interested in the daily life stories of the Gazans, despite the siege on Gaza, the corruption and the narrow political interests in the Strip.” He also said that an Israeli airstrike had hit Atallah’s parent’s house, killing several of his family members. “After surviving a lot of near-death situations,” Sharouf said, Atallah then evacuated to the Al-Shati refugee camp in northern Gaza City where he and additional members of his family were killed by an Israeli airstrike.

ISSAM ABDALLAH Oct. 13

Abdallah, a Lebanese, Beirut-based videographer for Reuters, was killed near the Lebanon border by shelling coming from an Israeli tank. Two shell attacks 36 seconds apart, fired on Abdallah and several other journalists. They were covering the Israeli shelling near Alma Al-Shaab in southern Lebanon between Israeli forces and Lebanon’s militant Hezbollah party. The journalists were perched upon a hill, clearly visible and not in the line of fire.

MOHAMMED ABU HASIRA Nov. 7

Abu Hasira, a journalist for the Palestinian Authority-run Wafa news agency, was killed in a strike on his home near Gaza City along with 42 of his family members, according to Wafa and the Palestinian Journalists’ Syndicate. They say Israeli bombing “targeted his house” over a period of three days.



WHEN A HOLY WAR SPREADS ACROSS THE UNIVERSE

Dune: Part 2

DIRECTED BY DENIS VILLENEUVE
LEGENDARY PICTURES, FEB. 2024

By Nicholas Powers

“Somebody help me,” a young Paul Atreides cries. He is gripped by a vision of the future in which charred corpses burn, and his soldiers wave his banner and slaughter innocents. “I see a holy war spreading across the universe like an unquenchable fire,” he kicks and screams. “A war in my name!”

The young Atreides’s terror in the 2021 film *Dune* becomes reality in *Dune: Part Two*. On the surface, the sequel cheers Native people fighting colonial rule. Peel back one layer, and the film becomes a warning against political and religious extremism. The warning comes in the climactic and ominous image of Fremen (a desert-dwelling people) going to war. Although not shown in *Dune: Part Two*, in the second book in the *Dune* series, *Dune Messiah*, which director Denis Villeneuve also plans to turn into a film, the Fremen people’s revolution grows into a galactic holy war that kills 61 billion people and sterilizes whole planets. *Dune: Part Two* is an antiwar film hidden inside a war film.

It is a timely warning. Fanaticism is rising. Former President Donald Trump is propelled by Christian nationalism even as Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is fueled by Hindu nationalism. *Dune: Part Two* could have been a popular film that warned audiences against fanaticism, but it fails in its approach. The antiwar content is overwhelmed by war spectacle. Moviegoers may leave with the exact opposite message from what author Frank Herbert intended when he wrote *Dune* in 1965, and we need to heed his warning now more than ever.

NOT ANOTHER “HERO”

Fremen freedom fighters pop up from holes in the sand. In a ballet of death, they roll, jump and stab the enemy Harkonnen occupying soldiers, who guard a giant metal harvester stripping a precious mineral known as Spice from their planet. Nimble stepping like dancers, the Fremen leave dead colonizers in their wake. Among the Fremen is a fierce, handsome newcomer Paul Atreides (played by an effective Timothée Chalamet), the runaway duke who makes common cause with them.

Dune: Part Two picks up seconds after *Dune*. In the first film, we were introduced to a galactic feudal empire where far-flung planets are tied together by Spice-fueled space travel. To cross the cosmos, pilots of the Spacing Guild eat Spice mined from Arrakis, or as the Fremen call it, Dune. At the center of this futuristic feudalism sits Emperor Shaddam IV, who leased Arrakis to the cruel House Harkonnen. Leery of the rising Duke Leto of House Atreides, Shaddam offers Arrakis to Leto in a ruse to rid himself of a rival. The emperor’s shock troops and Harkonnen soldiers attack the Atreides in their new stronghold on Dune in the night. They wipe out the Atreides, killing the duke as his wife Lady Jessica and his son Paul flee into the desert, where the Fremen find and take them in.

If you feel like you’ve seen *Dune: Part Two* before, it’s

because you have. Did you catch *Avatar* or *The Matrix* or *Lawrence of Arabia*? Well then you also saw *Dune: Part Two*. Distill the plots and you get the “hero’s journey,” an archetypal myth of a young hero called to adventure, who must journey through a foreign world of violence, face a crisis and symbolic death, and be reborn with new powers and knowledge in order to conquer and renew the world.

Dune: Part Two, whether intentionally or not, reinforces a subgenre of the hero’s journey, the white savior narrative in which a white protagonist goes into an “underworld” (the ghetto, slave plantation, Arrakis) to rescue people of color (slaves, the Fremen), faces danger (slavers, racist cops, the Harkonnens) and liberates the oppressed people, which in



turn rejuvenates the social order with new justice.

In *Dune: Part Two*, a strapping Paul Atreides undergoes a white savior hero’s journey. He sails through tests. He wins a knife fight with a Fremen. He rides one of the immense sandworms, mile-long giants that ram through mountainous dunes at top speed. He battles Harkonnens. He is a pupil of Chani, a Native woman sharply acted by Zendaya, and of course, they fall in love. He moves up the ranks at lightning speed. He is renamed by the Fremen, Paul “Usul” Muad’Dib.

He is a charismatic leader, feted as the “Mahdi,” the “Lisan al Gaib,” the “Prophet from the Outer World” who will lead the Fremen to destroy the Harkonnens and transform Arrakis into a green paradise.

Dune author Herbert hated all of this. He wanted us to hate it too.

HAMLET IN THE DESERT

What separates *Dune: Part Two* from the typical white savior hero’s journey is that director Denis Villeneuve reveals that it’s all based on a lie. The Fremen believe Paul is the messiah, as written in prophecy. Yet Paul knows full well the prophecy was authored by the Bene Gesserit, a black veil-wearing, secret sisterhood whose

members plant false religions throughout the universe. If one of their order, such as Paul’s mother, the Lady Jessica, needs safety among natives, she can use Bene Gesserit superstitions to gain power.

The Northern Fremen are more nationalist, less religious. The Southern Fremen are deeply fundamentalist. Chani is a Northern Fremen, and as she comes to love Paul, she is alarmed by how the Southern Fremen believe he is the messiah. In bed, she expresses worry because Paul’s mother, now a spiritual guide to the Fremen, fans the flames of religious belief. While fleeing a Harkonnen attack, Paul and Jessica argue. Paul says, “It is heartbreaking what your Bene Gesserit did to these people.” She retorts, “We gave them hope.” He yells, “That’s not hope!”

Herbert explicitly said, “I wrote the *Dune* series because I had this idea that charismatic leaders ought to come with a warning label on their forehead: ‘May be dangerous to your health.’”

Director Villeneuve doubled down when he talked about adapting the second book in Herbert’s series, *Dune Messiah*, into film, “*Dune Messiah* was written in reaction to the fact that people perceived Paul Atreides as a hero. Which is not what he wanted to do. My adaptation is closer to his idea that it’s actually a warning.”

Dune: Part Two’s plot is a fast, tightening cycle of violence. Harkonnens bomb Fremen. The Fremen blow up Spice harvesters. The eyes of the emperor turn to Arrakis. The Southern Fremen beg Paul to become the Mahdi and lead them. Paul is like Hamlet in the desert. Visions of galactic jihad terrify. Faced with war, he drinks the psychedelic “water of life,” a drug that grants him prescience. Finally, at a mass gathering, he holds up his knife and vows to lead them, “to paradise!”

But the real war in *Dune: Part Two* is not between the Fremen, the Harkonnens and eventually, the full might of the emperor’s shock troops. It’s between the content of the film and its form. The warning against fanaticism at *Dune: Part Two*’s core — about how lies can become a source of power and a just struggle can transform into bloodthirsty slaughter — is overwhelmed by its spectacle of war.

This is, in part, Villeneuve’s fault. He directs each frame like a Renaissance oil painter. The final battle has gorgeous atomic fireballs framed against a dry desert. Out of the smoke, giant sandworms emerge, their maws swallowing the emperor’s soldiers. Fremen fight like Alvin Ailey dancers. When Paul has a climatic knife fight with the last remaining Harkonnen, Feyd-Rautha, the two parry and jab and thrust as silhouettes against an orange sun. Villeneuve’s lush beautification of violence sabotages the film’s core message.

The audience only gets a hint at the core message when Paul kills Feyd, takes the emperor’s throne and orders millions of Fremen believers to attack the other planets and force their submission. “Lead them to paradise,” he says in a numbed voice.

Fanatic, yelling, triumphant, the Fremen board spaceships. High on victory, they are poised to wage a war of liberation. The audience cannot help but cheer. A long-oppressed people seize their destiny in the name of God. Only the ominous music hints at what the movie refused to say clearly. A bloodbath is coming. *Dune: Part Two* succeeds as a movie, but it fails Herbert’s own message.

This review originally appeared at truthout.org.

LOVE, REAL ESTATE AND A SMALL TOWN ON EDGE

The Stark Beauty of Last Things

BY CELINE KEATING

SHE WRITES PRESS

384 PAGES; OCTOBER 2023

By Eleanor J. Bader

The Native-settlement-turned-fishing village of Montauk, Long Island, New York's easternmost land spit, is an alluring place. There's ocean. There's forest. There are pristine beaches, small ponds, dunes and a lighthouse. And for more than a century Montauk's working-class residents co-existed, albeit reluctantly, with the upper crust from the nearby Hamptons. But their community began to morph early in the 21st century when climate change and overdevelopment began to pose significant dangers to the town's continued existence.



This reality is the centerpiece of Celine Keating's intense and elegantly-written third novel, *The Stark Beauty of Last Things*.

The story centers around the 11-acre Moorlands Parcel, an untamed area where locals hike, picnic and birdwatch. Not surprisingly, environmentalists want it preserved, while out-of-town realtors have swooped in with plans to build multi-million-dollar homes on the property. In fact, the developers are so eager to build that they've offered people whose homes abut the Parcel — the majority of whom live hand-to-mouth in houses that have been in their families for generations — vast sums to sell their holdings. Many find the offer tempting.

Other ideas are also floating around, and a third group of townspeople want to build an affordable housing complex on the land. They argue that the workers who wait tables, bartend and clean hotel rooms during Montauk's busy tourist season deserve to live in the town they service, rather than 50 miles away in less expensive parts of the county.

As you likely imagine, tensions run high as the deadline for what to do with Moorlands Parcel looms closer and closer.

Keating brings readers deep inside the conflict and introduces a diverse set of Montauk residents, all of them compelling. The story is told from each of their perspectives: There's Clancy Fredericks, a former foster kid who had a brief but meaningful childhood relationship with a volunteer Big Brother named Otto Lansky. Lansky, now retired after decades on the police force, wants little more than to fix his relationship with his estranged daughter, Theresa Nolan, a beautiful but remote bartender at a popular restaurant. Other characters include twenty-something Molly Lundgren and her boyfriend Billy Linehan, a fish seller and a fisherman who are lovingly raising Linehan's 11-year-old brother, Jonah. Artist and hotel proprietor Julianne Bishop, her husband Rob and their son Max comprise other central players.

That said, the presence of the Land Use Committee — five men — provides an endless source of tension for residents.

Keating is a masterful storyteller, and she has created a mood that blurs the lines between suspense, mystery and menace. What's more, Montauk's meaning in each individual's life adds texture to the story. This becomes especially poignant following Otto's unexpected death.

Once it becomes known that Otto left his home, money and membership on the Committee to Clancy, a relative newcomer to the area, gossip becomes fierce. Did Clancy trick Otto into giving

him an inheritance that should have gone to Theresa?

For his part, Clancy is staggered. He feels that Otto's gift is undeserved and hates the responsibility he's been handed. "The conflicts in the town weren't just rich outsiders versus working class locals," Keating writes. "They were more nuanced — between commercial and sport fisherman, environmentalists and small business owners."

So, what to do?

Suffice it to say that compromise seems unlikely. As debate swirls, the pushes-and-pulls on the townspeople, made worse

LAND'S END: Montauk, New York, at the far eastern end of Long Island, is home to Celine Keating's third novel.

by a hurricane that causes significant property damage, come into play. Throughout, Keating presents a compassionate glimpse into the lives of good people who are struggling to live with integrity and purpose. During the unfolding yearlong battle, Keating skillfully probes other issues in the characters' lives, among them, the lifelong after effects of being raised by a string of strangers, the ups and downs of romantic love, and what it means to protect children while allowing them the freedom to explore and discover their passions. All told, it rings true.

Deft and wise, evocative and potent, *The Stark Beauty of Last Things* was one of 2023's most engaging small-press novels. While I found the step-parent relationship between Jonah and Molly a bit too rosy, this is a small critique in an otherwise vibrant and timely novel.

BROOKLYN FREE SCHOOLS

Continued from Page 12

vironment, even chairing one of the weekly meetings. While around 15 of the other children and staff members sat around on folding chairs, yoga mats and beanbags, he brought up each topic on the agenda, called on his classmates by name when they raised their hands, and listened attentively as they spoke. He also led conversation about a potential memorial for their recently passed class mice.

The free-school model isn't for all families, but it's an option — something rare in the American school system. As both public and private schools rely more heavily on regimented days and constant testing, students who need an alternative can find it at BFS.

"We've had students who have had friends die at the hands of gun violence, we have students who are dealing with different emotional needs, we have students who are neurodivergent," Scott said. "Many of the families of these young people do not have the means or privilege to find ... the private institutions or private tutors or therapy for these young people."

Scott said that they are in an "all hands on deck" situation for closing their financial gaps. In addition to brainstorming fundraising ideas as a class, some of the high-school-aged students have taken to social media to spread the word about the school's needs. Their GoFundMe page has raised \$10,000 since last summer, a quarter of the way to their \$40,000 goal. In November the school hosted a "Youth Explosion" night, with a \$20 suggested donation, that featured musical and spoken-word performances from students. Students have also tossed around the idea of hosting their upcoming play, *The Princess and the Frog*, in their classroom and charging a small ticket fee.

After 21 years of serving families all across Brooklyn, BFS now needs some help to continue their commitment to equitable alternative education. Parents like Luis Castillo and Nadia Ketoure are unsure how their families would manage without the resources the school provides them.

"I don't believe that BFS will close — I'm not even putting energy in that direction," Ketoure said. "This is his school."

March/April 2024

THE INDEPENDENT

INDY STORAGE REQUEST

WE'RE MOVING OUT OF OUR LONG-TIME HOME AT THE BROOKLYN COMMONS AND WILL BE WORKING REMOTELY. IF YOU HAVE EXTRA SPACE IN YOUR BASEMENT THAT WE COULD USE FOR STORAGE, CONTACT@INDYPENDENT.ORG OR 917-426-4856.

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